Jack, Ian. “Britain took more out of India than it put in – could China do the same to Britain?” *The Guardian*. June 20, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jun/20/britain-took-more-out-of-india>

A closer parallel is Bengal, the Indian province whose economy was destroyed by the technological strength of northern Britain in what the writer Jeremy Seabrook has called "the first great de-industrialisation of the modern world".

For at least two centuries the handloom weavers of Bengal produced some of the world's most desirable fabrics, especially the fine muslins, light as "woven air", that were in such demand for dressmaking and so cheap that Britain's own cloth manufacturers conspired to cut off the fingers of Bengali weavers and break their looms. Their import was ended, however, by the imposition of duties and a flood of cheap fabric – cheaper even than poorly paid Bengali artisans could provide – from the new steam mills of northern England and lowland Scotland that conquered the Indian as well the British market. [India](https://www.theguardian.com/world/india) still grew cotton, but Bengal no longer spun or wove much of it. Weavers became beggars, while the population of Dhaka, which was once the great centre of muslin production, fell from several hundred thousand in 1760 to about 50,000 by the 1820s.

Tigers and leopards roamed the streets. Seabrook\* gives a memorable picture of dereliction: "The city of men had become a city of animals. Weavers' dwellings were overgrown, the thatch alive with birds, snakes and insects, while roussettes – bats small and multi-coloured as butterflies – flew in and out of earth-mounds that had been homes; hunched vultures surveyed tracts of land in which the human voice was stilled. People lost the skill of their fingers, and only the roughest-made country cloth still found a market among the poorest."

Subsequently, India became the exporter of raw materials and foodstuffs – raw cotton and jute, coal, opium, rice, spice and tea – rather than manufactured goods. …

\*Jeremy Seabrook is the author of The Song of the Shirt - Cheap Garments Across Centuries and Countries.